



One of the most common misconceptions about how the United States will look after the full implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is that there will no longer be a need for Free and Charitable Clinics to continue to provide charity care as a member of the safety net. In fact, many are surprised to hear that even after full implementation of the ACA, there may be as many as 26 million people who are still without access to health insurance.

In the upcoming months and years, doctors, hospitals, navigators, states, clinics and patients will be addressing the needs of the underserved with respect to affordability, accessibility and portability of primary, specialty, dental care and medication access.

What is even more shocking is that under the Affordable Care Act dental care for adults is not considered an essential service, meaning it is not required as part of coverage. The subsidized health insurance plans that will become available in 2014 are not required to offer dental services to adults. It should be noted that the ACA does require that oral health care is provided to children.

Even more shocking is that many public insurance plans barely cover dental benefits and in 22 states for individuals with Medicaid there is no dental coverage or is only available in emergency situations.

Across the country, Free and Charitable Clinics and other members of the safety net are providing access to much needed primary, mental health and dental care for free or at a dramatically low cost.

Free and charitable clinics are safety-net health care organizations that utilize a volunteer/staff model to provide a range of medical, dental, pharmacy, vision and/or behavioral health services to economically disadvantaged individuals. Such clinics are 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations, or operate as a program component or affiliate of a 501(c)(3) organization. Free or charitable clinics restrict eligibility for their services to individuals who are uninsured, underinsured and/or have limited or no access to primary, specialty or prescription health care.

Our clinics provide this care to the uninsured and the medically underserved by utilizing an army of volunteers and some paid staff. Our clinics rely on financial and product donations, which allow for dental care for the uninsured and medically underserved. Over the last two year Free and Charitable Clinics have seen a 40% increase in demand of services from patients, while facing a 20% decrease in donations.

Also our country is going to be facing a shortage of doctors in the future. This little known fact is one that causes much concern for those who are members of the safety net serving the under and uninsured. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges the USA will face a shortage of 90,000 primary care doctors in 2020 and this number will continue to increase in the future. This doctor shortage will dramatically impact the ability to serve all of the insured and uninsured in the country.

Massachusetts lead the way under the "Romney Care" plan by implementing a state wide health insurance program, while the Affordable Care Act is loosely based on this plan there are major differences, primarily the summer's ruling by the Supreme Court where states are not required to expand Medicaid eligibility levels. As



we look to the future of the ACA and compare that to the Massachusetts plan, we understand that issues such as affordability, portability and accessibility of coverage are still large issues for many of the uninsured.

While the Affordable Care Act is a first step towards access to health care for some, it is not a complete solution for primary care and with respect to dental care it leaves great holes in care. Until effective reforms can be implemented, there are people in communities throughout this nation who are standing in the gap and filling the need as best they can every day. They are the men and women who provide their services at more than 1,200 Free and Charitable Clinics across the country, as well as at other safety-net health care providers.

While access to health care and dental care will surely be used for political gains, those of us associated with Free and Charitable Clinics will continue doing the work for which we wish there was less demand.